

Subject: Draft Speech – RYCO Secretary General
Event: Berlin Process Leaders' Summit, London
Date: 22 October 2025

Your Excellencies, Leaders, Distinguished Colleagues,

It is a great honor to address you on behalf of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, here in London. I wish to thank the United Kingdom for its leadership of the Berlin Process this year, and for making youth a central part of its agenda.

And this focus could not be more timely, as it reflects the pressing reality we face today. Across the Western Balkans, one topic emerges again and again in conversations between young people: migration. Not always because they want to, but because too often they feel that by staying they will have less opportunities to shape the future they seek.

At the Western Balkans Youth Forum in Pristina, young leaders told us exactly why.

First, our education systems are outdated. Diplomas from our universities are often not recognized abroad, while domestic programs stay behind global standards. A talented student from Skopje or Sarajevo does not leave out of curiosity, but because their degree cannot open doors for opportunities at home. Second, path to employment is unfair. Young people face closed networks, unpaid internships, and recruitment based on connections, not competence. Many see migration as the only route to a decent job and a fair salary. Third they leave because of insecurity. Weak institutions, corruption, and lack of protection for rights make them feel unsafe and excluded from decisions that shape their lives.

The message from Pristina was clear, youth do not need sympathy they need systems that work, systems that address the pressing issue of brain drain.

This is why RYCO, together with our German partners, is leading efforts to establish a Regional Youth Trust Fund, a concrete, operational response to the issues driving migration.

The Fund will provide a transparent, regionally owned, and donor-supported financing mechanism that ensures continuity of youth initiatives in reconciliation, mobility, and economic empowerment. Our goal is simple, turn brain drain into brain gain.

To achieve this, we need strong political commitment and sustained financial support. Today, I invite the leaders of the Berlin Process to stand with us as founding contributors of the Trust Fund and to integrate it into your national youth and migration strategies.

The youth have already done their part, they mapped the problems, offered solutions, and asked us to act. Now it is our turn. Together, we can transform the desire of leaving into the

opportunity of staying and ensure that youth see their future not elsewhere, but at home, in our Western Balkans.

Excellencies,

The credibility of the Berlin Process will be judged by the opportunities it creates for young people. Opportunities to move, to learn, to work, and to thrive in their own region. Through the proposed Trust Fund, RYCO stands ready to help translate your political commitments into lasting impact.

Let us ensure that here in London, this Summit is remembered not only for its vision, but for the actions it inspired.

Thank you.